

Children's Cabinet

January 26, 2021

Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions (2 min)
- Vote on adoption of November and December meeting minutes (3 min)
- Early Childhood Strategic Plan (15 min)
- Early Learning Facilities Needs Assessment (30 min)
- Public Comment (10 min)
- Adjournment



ECCE Strategic Plan Refresh

ECCE Strategic Plan Adopted in 2020

Mission: Rhode Island's comprehensive focus on Early Childhood Care and Education brings together providers, programs, advocates and families to ensure that our children prenatal through age five have equitable access to high-quality education, health and developmental care, and services and supports needed in order to enter school healthy and ready to succeed.

Vision: All Rhode Island children enter kindergarten educationally, social- emotionally, and developmentally ready to succeed, putting them on a path to read proficiently by 3rd grade.

Guiding Principles:

- **Focus on Vulnerable Populations:** We believe in focusing our work. In doing so, we prioritize actions that will deliver outcomes for our highest-risk children to ensure kindergarten readiness, putting them on a path to reading proficiently by third grade.
- **Inclusive and Diverse Engagement:** We believe our work is best supported through strong, sustained partnerships with families, caregivers, community members, educational institutions and providers. Collectively, we can positively impact outcomes for children.
- **Commitment to a Mixed Delivery Model:** We believe in providing child care and education through a diverse set of programs, services and providers so that young children and families can access the resources they need to thrive, in a setting that works best for them.
- **Workforce Advocacy and Support:** We believe in, and support, the individuals caring for our youngest constituents and support the expansion of programs that help recruit, prepare and retain a high- quality early childhood care and education workforce.
- **Collaborative Leadership:** We believe in the mutual alignment and advocacy of the Governor, her Cabinet, and those agencies representing the health, well-being and education of young children and families, from prenatal and maternal health through to school- aged services, education and support.
- **Alignment of Funding with Impact:** We believe in rigorously pursuing diverse and sustainable funding, while also assessing the impact of our investments against desired outcomes for children. RI commits to refining our strategies and actions based on those finding

The ECCE Strategic plan has five core objectives to achieve the vision.



Objectives:

1. Rhode Island's early childhood programs meet high-quality standards for care and education as defined by our Quality Rating and Improvement System. (Lead: **Caitlin Molina**)
2. Children and families can equitably access and participate in the early childhood care, services, and supports that will help them reach their potential and enter school healthy and ready to succeed. (Lead: **Blythe Berger**)
3. All four-year olds in Rhode Island have access to high-quality Pre-K, inclusive of parental choice and student needs. (Lead: **Lisa Foehr**)
4. Secure the quality and delivery of ECCE through increased and sustainable funding and operational improvements (Lead: **Kayla Rosen**)
5. Expand the depth and quality of family and child-level data accessible to and used by agencies, programs, and partners to drive decisions. (Lead: **Kayla Rosen**)

The Plan is meant to be a living document – on an annual basis, we are reviewing the plan to ensure it addresses changing circumstances and is aligned to any emerging needs.



Refresh Process

- 1.Team review & update:** Objective leads reviewed plan and proposed updated.
- 2.Public Comment:** Updated strategic plan presented at Children’s Cabinet & posted for public comment for 30+ days. We received 5 survey responses and a letter from the community
- 3.Feedback incorporated:** Team reviewed responses & incorporated feedback into the plan
- 4.Final adoption:** the ECCE Steering Committee reviewed the updates and adopted the plan for 2021

Thanks to feedback from the community, we made changes to the plan’s guiding principles and objectives.

Section	Changes Incorporated
Guiding principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Add a guiding principle to recognize that the early childhood field extends from prenatal/birth through age eight• We suggest adding a specific guiding principle on race equity.• We suggest adding the word “educating” into the Workforce principle so it reads “caring for and educating” our youngest constituents
Objective 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Added an action item specifically relating to FCC
Objective 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that community action programs are part of solution as well since economic supports and access to whole family supports have a positive effect on equity within early childhood• Strategy 1 action step 3, I would include Head Start in the list of options as foster children are categorically eligible to receive Head Start services, all of our HS programs are considered high-quality and when reunification occurs, the slot is an entitlement to the child so when reunification occurs if the family is interested, they are welcome to remain in the program.• Strategy 4 misses the opportunity for building even stronger linkages with Pediatric care, citing immunizations and lead instead of intentional endorsement and connections to home visiting, Reach Out & Read, Medical Legal Partnerships, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Primary Care, etc.• Activities (for objectives) need to include things beyond home visiting as that isn't the choice for all families.

Setting lagging metrics

These five lagging metrics will be our high level measures of whether we are on track to increase the number of children ready for Kindergarten.

Objective	Lagging Metric	Baseline
1. High quality early learning opportunities for children:	% of CCAP children enrolled in 4 or 5 star providers	25%
2. Equitable access to high quality services & supports	% improvement of vulnerable population participation rates in high-quality programs	TBD
3. Universal Pre-K access	# of 4 year olds enrolled in high-quality Pre-K	1848
4. Sustainable system	\$ in new funding leveraged for ECCE purposes (state budget, federal funds, grants, etc)	~\$14M (+ possible \$15M in bond)
5. Continuous improvement through integrated data	# of data elements that are integrated at the child level	TBD

“Overall, the plan show's great promise for improving outcomes for our state's youngest citizens. But will we have the political will and resources to implement it is always the burning question. For our children's sake, I hope so.”

– *Survey respondent*

Rhode Island

Early Learning Facilities: *Assessments, Funds, and Bonds, Oh My*

*Children's Cabinet Meeting
January 26, 2021*

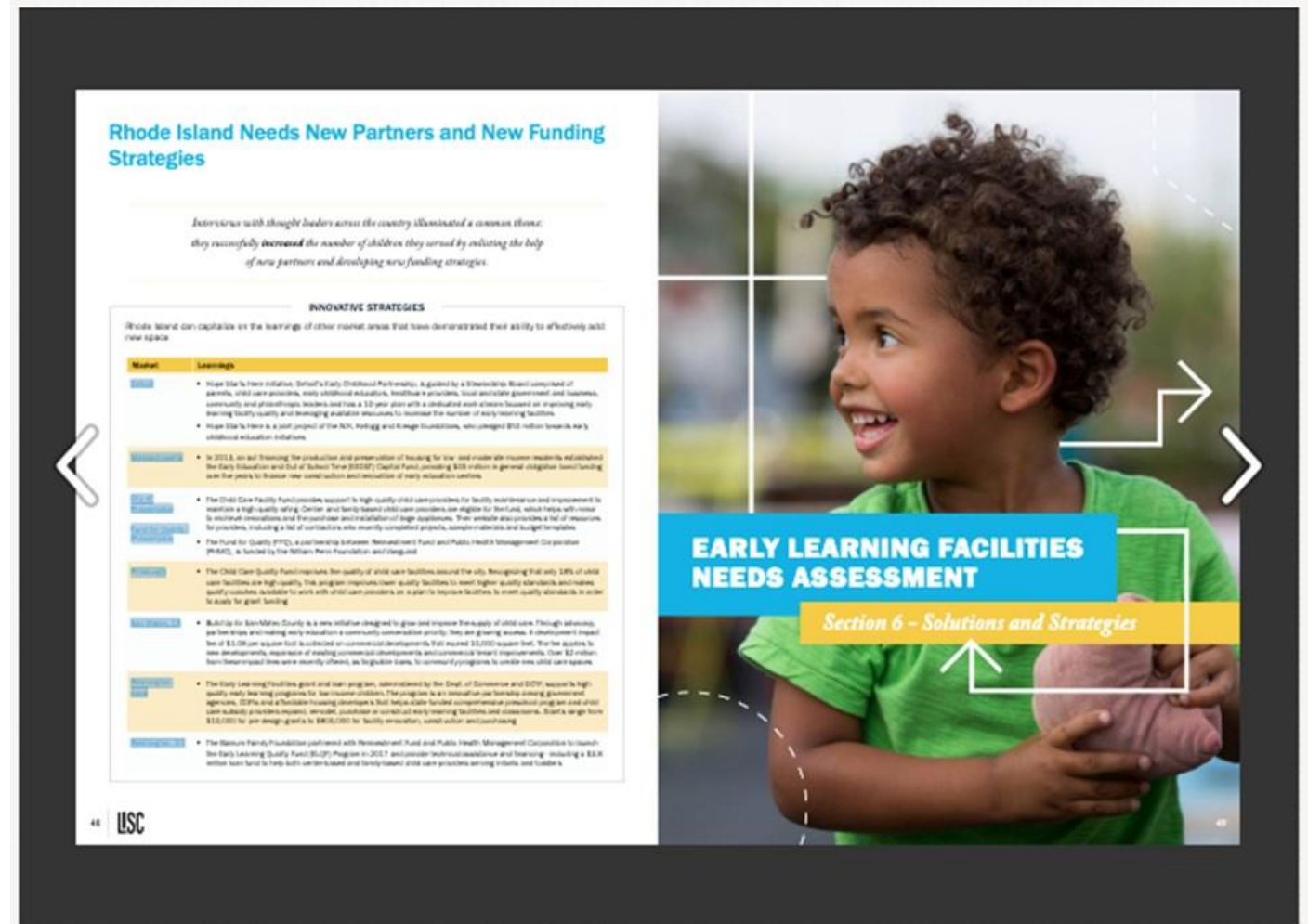


LSC

Let's go wayyy back to 2019 and review the Early Learning Facilities Assessment that was conducted.

The 2019 Early Learning Facilities Assessment

- This assessment was commissioned by the State of Rhode Island as part of its strategic planning process, funded by a [federal Preschool Development Grant \(PDG\)](#)
- Focus is on describing facility conditions, capacity, and challenges, but most importantly, [laying out actionable recommendations for improving quality and access in the state's early learning system](#)
- The assessment focuses [on facility needs within the early learning system as a whole](#) - expansion of the pre-k program without investment in the rest of the birth through five system could be detrimental to children and working families of Rhode Island

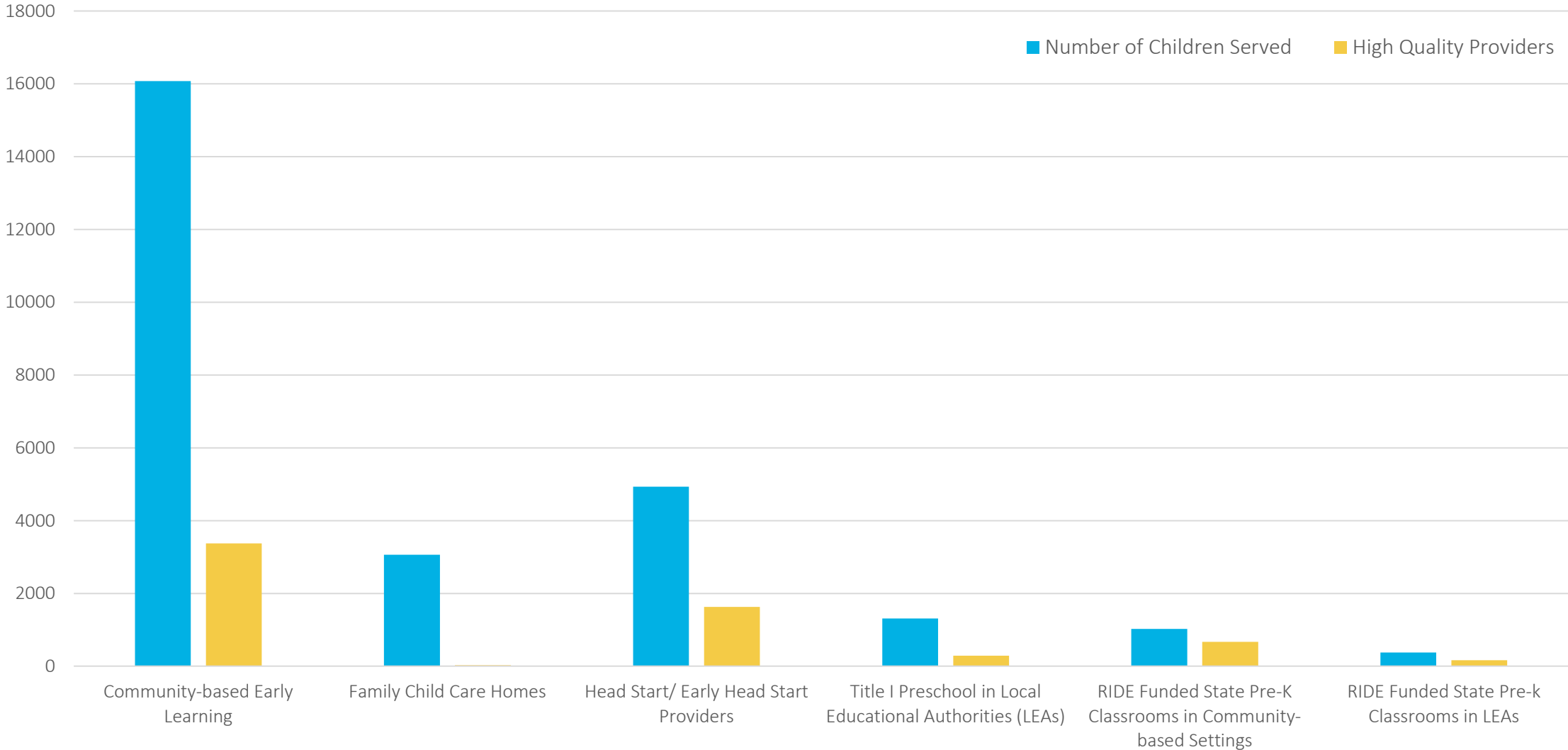


Read the full report here:

<https://riccelff.org/2019-early-learning-facilities-needs-assessment/>

The Assessment Included Six Program Types

All are Essential Components of Rhode Island’s Mixed Delivery Early Learning System



And Six Distinct Areas of Exploration

Used to report on conditions, capacity, & challenges as well as answer some key questions



Questions posed by leadership:

- Where do we find space for 7,000 quality Pre-K seats? And, how quickly can we find these spaces?
- How do we raise equitable access to quality across the board, particularly in infant/toddler care?
- How do we increase the number of quality infant/toddler slots available?
- How specifically are regulations prohibiting expansion and impeding quality growth?
- What specific types of investments are most needed?
- Where does family child care fit in to the equation?

Challenges posed by leadership:

- Find creative and out of the box ideas for creating new early learning spaces?
- Bring us solutions not just problems
- Create a dynamic report that can be used, not just sit on a shelf
- Make sure when the community reads it they hear their voices

Surveys

- 100% of licensed center-based settings and LEAs surveyed
- 38% return rate – 59% return rate from high quality centers
- Data shows capacity, quality, and financial limitations

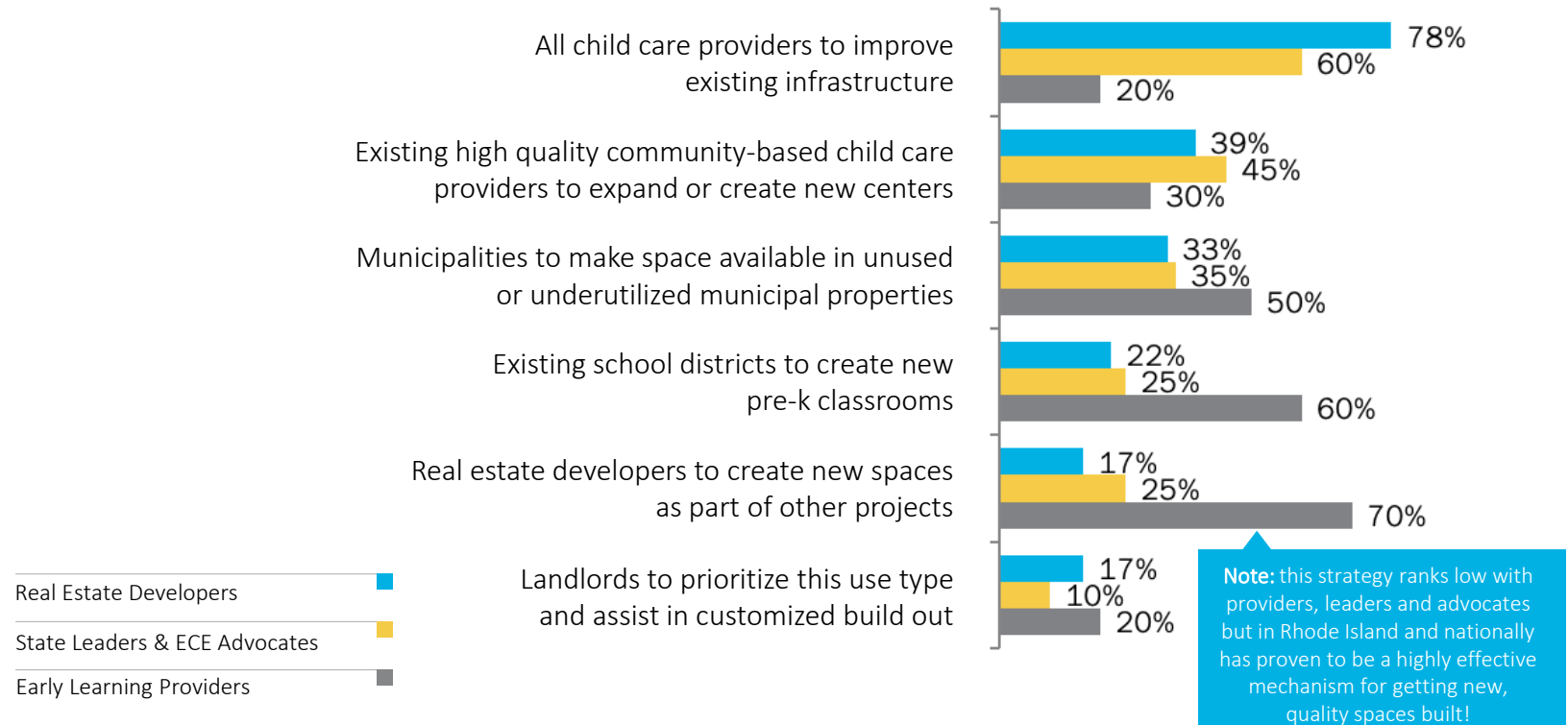


18%	Operators who indicate they have sufficient cash on hand to address a facility emergency
87%	Operators who say their facilities need improvements or upgrades to improve the quality of their program
19%	Operators who have not made any improvements/upgrades/renovations to their buildings, playgrounds or parking lots in the last 5 years
88%	Operators who would need funding in order to improve or upgrade their facilities
57%	Operators who say money is a barrier to operating additional classrooms at their current location
65%	Providers who looked for space to expand but found it to be cost prohibitive
29%	Operators who view building regulations as a barrier to opening new classrooms
18%	Operators who indicated they would need help navigating the regulatory process if they were upgrading their existing facilities

Focus Groups

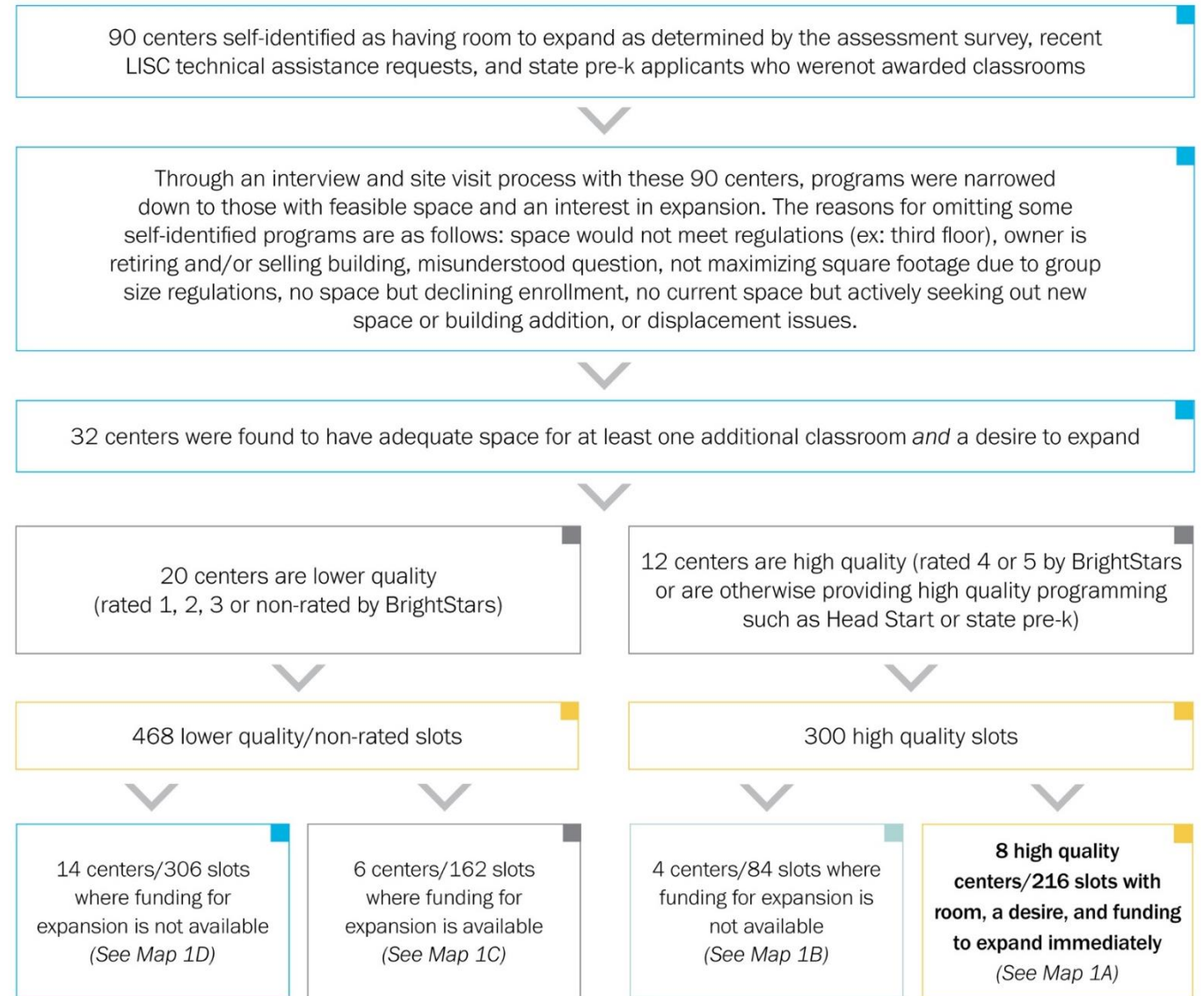
- Formal focus groups held for state leaders, early learning providers, and real estate developers
- Disparities among the groups in how to best accomplish facilities component of universal pre-k
- Informal focus groups also held with existing associations and with family child care providers

Achieving universal pre-k in Rhode Island means creating spaces for 7,000 four-year-olds that meet all regulations and support quality. This equates to about 300,000 square feet of space. The best way to accomplish this is to incentivize:



Site Visits

- Visited 100% of 2019 pre-k applicants
- Visited or interviewed (if recently visited for other technical assistance) 100% of community-based settings and LEAs indicating space available to expand and/or interest in expanding
- Visited any new spaces under consideration for expansion
- Site visits were guided by the use of LISC's proprietary Early Learning Facility Self-Assessment Tool available for download at www.riccelff.org
- Evaluated spaces for pre-k readiness and discussed barriers (such as lack of funding)
- Categorized to assess potential for expansion
- Rhode Island has limited potential for expansion within existing community-based early learning settings
- While 76% of centers surveyed indicated they had made improvements to their space in the past 5 years, site visits found these changes were not significant enough to have meaningful impact on overall condition of spaces which continue to be in generally poor repair



Data Review

- Mapping of existing infrastructure against estimated need
- Converting preschool space to infant space is feasible from a facility standpoint, but not from a financial standpoint
- Robust regulatory review does not indicate that regulations present barriers to growth
- Only 10-15% of child care revenues are allocated for occupancy costs
- More than 75% of licensed family child care providers own the home where they operate

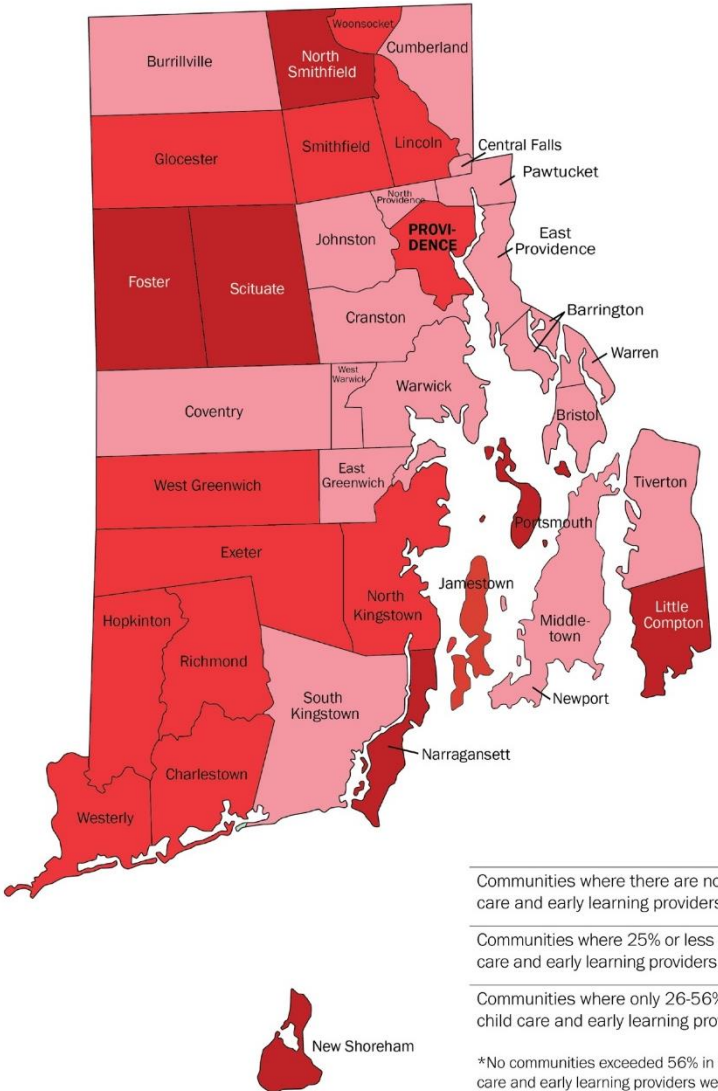


Rhode Island Already has Enough Built Space for its Four Year Old Population, Though Not Always in Community of Residence



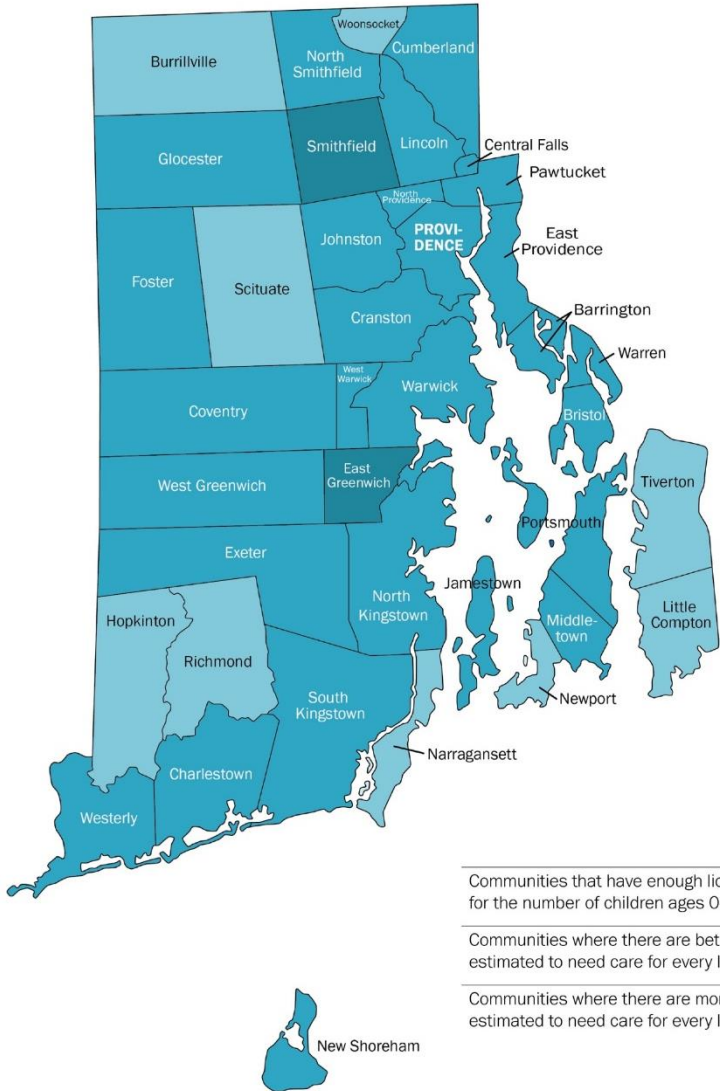
Disparities in the location of current four year old slots in Rhode Island minimize the ability for a “one size fits all” solution to work well across the entire state. Rhode Island’s requirements that state pre-k programs can only be offered in a child’s town of residence is a challenge, particularly in municipalities that are child care deserts.

Rhode Island has Enough Built Space for its Four Year Old Population, However, Not Enough Quality Spaces



There are enough licensed preschool slots to serve 7,000 four year olds, but they are not quality slots.

Rhode Island Does Not Have Enough Licensed Spaces for its Infant and Toddler Population in Need of Care



There are 24 cities and towns that have more than 3 infants and toddlers needing care for every 1 licensed slot available (a sign of a child care desert). There is a crisis in infant/toddler care, especially quality care.

Rhode Island has 18 Communities with no High Quality Infant/Toddler Care Slots at All



There are 18 cities and towns that have NO high quality infant and toddler care available. In the remaining communities, high quality infant and toddler slots are limited.

Interviews

Geographies highlighted in the report where promising – and potentially replicable – early learning facility practices are in place or emerging are:

- Massachusetts
- Washington DC
- Washington State
- Detroit
- San Mateo, CA
- Philadelphia
- Pittsburgh



Interviews with thought leaders across the country illuminated a common theme:

They successfully increased the number of children they served by enlisting the help of new partners and developing new funding strategies.

Project Examples

LISC conducted a comprehensive analysis of the requirements to add quality space within a mixed delivery system and determined that costs can vary wildly, ranging from a low of \$26/square foot to improve the quality of an existing community-based or Head Start facility to a high of \$599/square foot to create an innovative new quality facility or do substantial upgrading to an abandoned building.

Timelines for these project types are equally disparate, with improvements to existing facilities typically requiring only a few months while constructing new, innovative spaces can take several years.

- In a mixed delivery system there is no one single strategy that will solve the problem, a multi-faceted approach is needed
- Maximizing use of existing infrastructure is essential
- Partnerships and new funding streams are foundational to success



Capitalize on Existing Space in Community-based **Early Learning Centers & Head Start** Locations



Capitalize on Existing Space in **Public Schools**



Facilitate **Partnerships** Between High Quality Early Learning Providers Ready to Expand and Community-based Organizations with Available and Appropriate Spaces



Facilitate Strategies that Connect High Quality Early Learning Providers Ready to Expand with Available and Appropriate Spaces in State and **Municipal Buildings**



Initiate Funding Strategies and Innovative Partnerships and Ideas that Build a Strong Pipeline of New **Construction Projects**

Solutions and Strategies to Promote Growth and Access in Quality

FUNDING

Take necessary steps to include early learning facility bond referendum on the 2020 ballot. Utilize highly successful Massachusetts program as a model. This is the most clear-cut way to access the large amount of capital needed to grow the system to scale and enable prioritized providers to make necessary improvements to infrastructure. Funding can be tied to state priorities and critical needs.

Include line item in the state budget for a small grants program to be used for facility planning and predevelopment activities as well as urgent space-related health, safety and quality issues. Utilize funding to emphasize state priorities. Seek matching opportunities from private funders.

Develop, fund and implement a state backed loan guarantee program in order to incentivize greater private investment in the early learning sector.

Engage and partner with utility companies to offer specialized and targeted incentives for early learning providers to convert to renewable energy sources for operational cost savings

POLICIES

Contemplate policy change that allows delaying start-up of newly awarded pre-k classrooms to allow time for adequate planning and infrastructure development. Few providers or developers will build new space on speculation and current time frame does not allow for development of new spaces.

Reconsider policy that requires child to attend state pre-k in his or her community of residence which allows for better use of existing infrastructure.

Work with legislature and municipalities to:

- Create a blanket property tax exemption or stabilization program for providers meeting key benchmarks (quality, high needs populations, etc.) This will afford greater financial stability to existing providers and better encourage new development.
- Lessen zoning restrictions so that more buildings and sites can be considered for early learning use.

Review tiered reimbursement policies to create easier pathway for existing high quality providers to access higher rates at any newly developed sites to minimize start-up operating losses.

PARTNERS

New partners from different backgrounds than traditional early learning advocates are needed. Form an early learning facilities task force similar to the one in San Mateo County, CA that includes business, real estate experts, philanthropy, government and educators. To be effective this group must include new partners with specialized expertise.

Connect with leadership of other states currently grappling with similar issues. Form Governor's Association Working Group to advocate federally and share lessons learned and strategy successes.

Support and incentivize partnerships between LEAs and high quality community-based early learning providers to maximize use of appropriate infrastructure available within many school systems.

Engage Rhode Island's philanthropic community in a shared vision to support growth of a quality early learning system. Evidence from around the country points to the vital role that private funding plays in successful early learning policy.

REGULATIONS

SMILEE Regulations are needed for facilities - Specific, Measurable, Incremental, Logical, Enforceable, Enforced. Ensuring facilities can be readily measured and regulations consistently understood should be a top priority for the next revision to standards.

Create and operationalize tools that support regulators with consistency and transparency and guide providers in clearly understanding requirements. These are needed to support shared understandings and consistent application.

Create a central clearinghouse for all regulations connected to facilities. This could be as simple as a website page that contains links to resources and includes links to resources, all applicable regulations and key contacts.

PROGRAM SUPPORTS

Develop and launch an online platform such as the ones available in Philadelphia, DC, Detroit and New Jersey to readily identify and easily connect providers, available sites, developers, funders and areas of need.

Create a more robust set of resources to guide providers through the real estate process and educate other essential partners on key components of quality early learning space.

Increase access to training and supports to guide current and potential providers through the facility improvement and development processes.

Ensure access to robust on-site facility related support for all components of the mixed delivery system..

INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

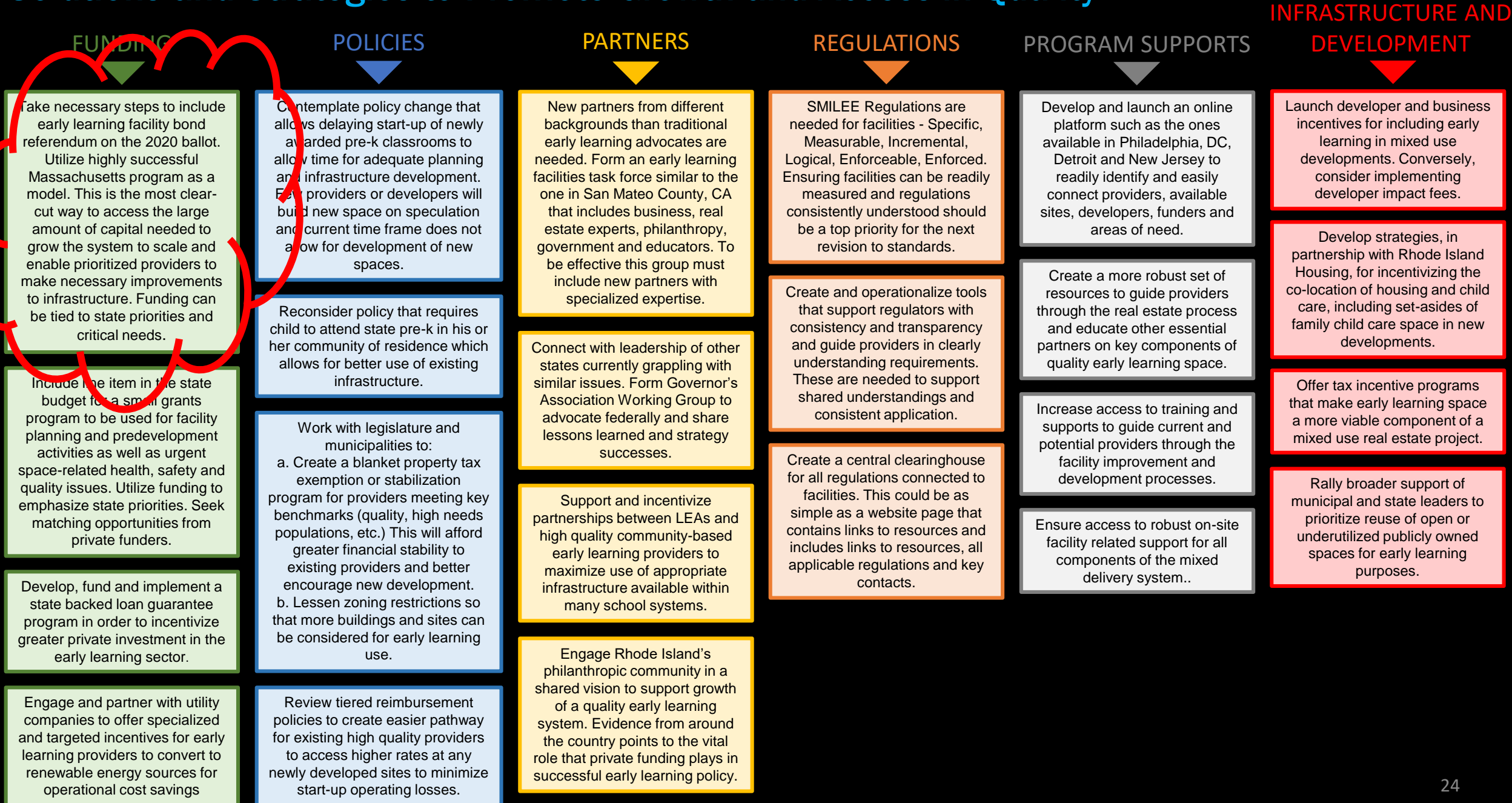
Launch developer and business incentives for including early learning in mixed use developments. Conversely, consider implementing developer impact fees.

Develop strategies, in partnership with Rhode Island Housing, for incentivizing the co-location of housing and child care, including set-asides of family child care space in new developments.

Offer tax incentive programs that make early learning space a more viable component of a mixed use real estate project.

Rally broader support of municipal and state leaders to prioritize reuse of open or underutilized publicly owned spaces for early learning purposes.

Solutions and Strategies to Promote Growth and Access in Quality



Then boom. A pandemic struck and forced focus on the importance of healthy and safe spaces.

DHS responded with the Child Care Provider Relief Fund.

2020 Child Care Provider Relief Fund

The State of Rhode Island approved **\$5,000,000** to help sustain the State's essential child care infrastructure through emergency relief grants.

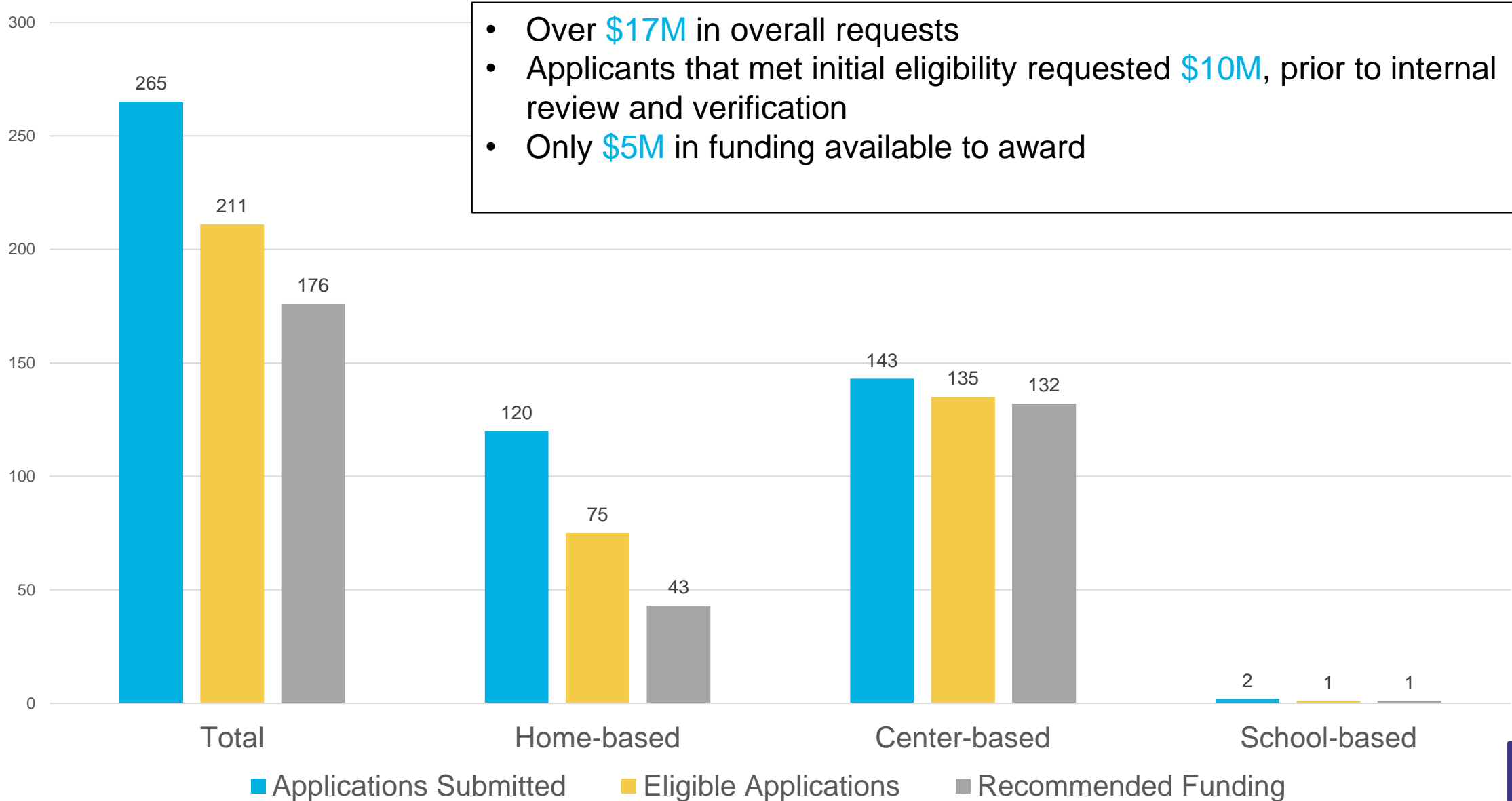
Funds must be used for actions taken to respond to the public health emergency by addressing a public health need and business interruptions **due to COVID-19 related closures**.

Grants were available in amounts up to **\$150,000 in total per location for the following two uses:**

1. Small **capital improvements** necessary to facilitate compliance with COVID-19-related health and safety measures
2. Offset **occupancy costs** incurred during time of reduced revenue due to COVID-19 related closure or reduced enrollment; includes expenses such as rent/mortgage, utilities, and costs for disinfection of facilities in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency.



Overview of Applications



Overview of Applications

Provider Type	Number of Applications Received	Eligibility Status	LISC TA Needed
Center-Based (Single Site)	51 Applications	45 Eligible/4 Ineligible/2 incomplete	25 Applicants
Center-Based (Multi-Site/Multi Social Service Agency)	92 Applications	90 Eligible/2 Ineligible	72 Applicants
School-Based	2 Applications	1 Eligible/1 Ineligible	2 Applicants
Family Child Care	120 Applications	75 Eligible/40 Not eligible/5 Incomplete	56 Applicants
Total	265 Applications	211 Eligible Applications	

Funding Purpose	Number of Applications
Capital Funds	101 Applications
Occupancy Costs	36 Applications
Combination*	128 Applications

*Applicant has applied for both occupancy cost reimbursement and capital improvements

Proposed Use of Capital Funding	Number of Proposals*
Small-scale renovations	183 Proposals
Equipment purchases	150 Proposals
Purchase of supplies/PPE	91 Proposals

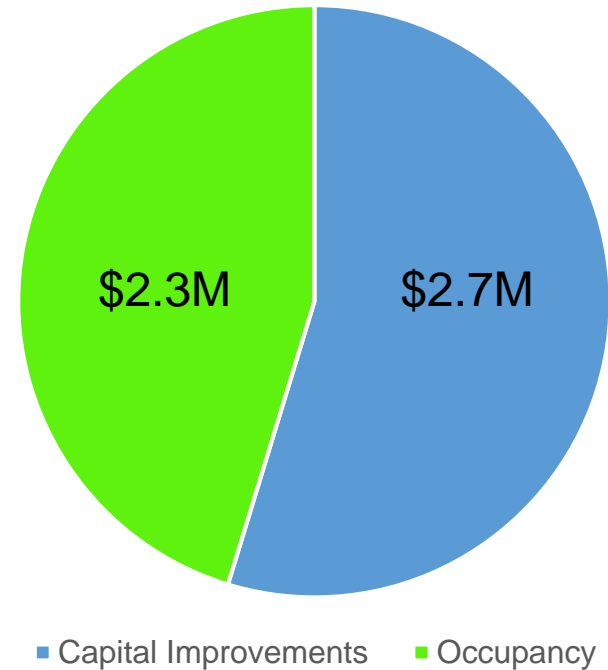
*Please note that most applicants are proposing a combination of uses for capital funding

Grant Awards and Health and Safety Improvements Made

We were able to provide funding to 116 organizations at 175 different child care locations.

Examples of some of the funded small capital project categories are as follows:

- Indoor air quality improvements (upgraded HVAC systems, added filtering systems, replacement of inoperable windows for additional fresh air, air purifiers)
- Exterior Improvements (awnings for sun shade covering and enhanced protection for entry screenings, fencing for separated spaces, walkways for secure, separate, and safe entry)
- Increased hygiene and handwashing (additional sinks – standard, portable, and outdoor – additional toilets, touch-free faucets and soap/paper towel/sanitizer dispensers)
- PPE, cleaning, and sanitization materials
- Replacement of finishes with more easily cleaned surfaces (flooring, wall surfaces)
- Renovations to expand spaces for smaller groups sizes (increasing overall square footage)

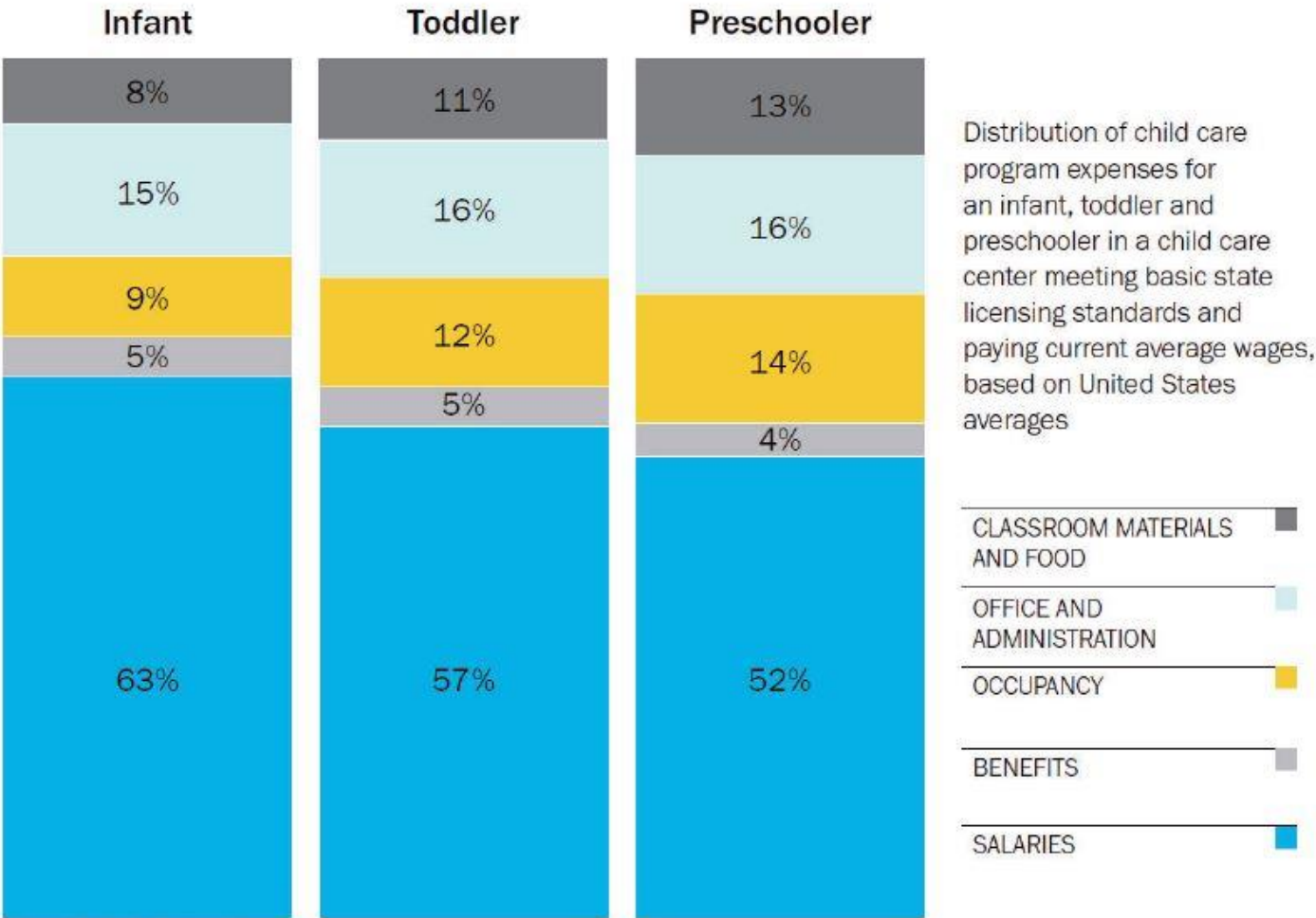


Through the wake of 2020 and into 2021, a special election will take place on March 2nd and Early Childhood Care and Education Capital Fund Bond (Q5) will be on the ballot.

Access to Capital is Critical

Early learning facility projects are complex and costly.

Development of appropriate space can often run as much as **25% more** than traditional commercial construction, yet revenue streams don't provide adequate capital to address those costs. Data show that only 12% of total revenue is available to address facility-related costs. This provides barely enough for basic operating and maintenance, and leaves very little available for improvement or expansion. In addition, due to the specialized nature of the space required, coupled with the vulnerable populations served, many sites available for expansion are not suitable.



Source: Center for American Progress

A “YES” on Question 5 Will Provide Necessary Capital



The funding would be distributed through small grants for urgent health and safety needs and provide for quality improvement and reconfiguration of space; a larger pool to address the creation or rehabilitation of vacant or blighted properties to create new, high quality spaces; and a set aside for intensive project technical support, training and compliance.

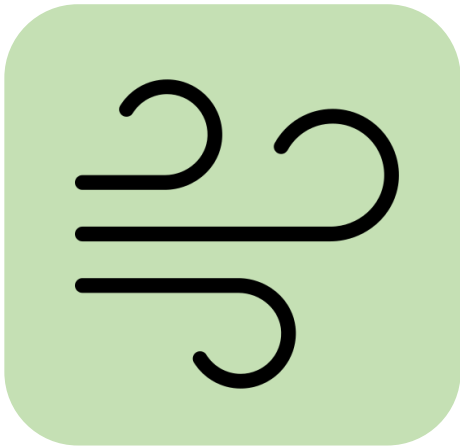
Access to public dollars for facilities will enable our communities to leverage resources and address the needs of most vulnerable children and families, and provide local community economic stimulus and construction trade business growth.

The Pandemic Highlighted the Need for Capital Making this Bond More Important

You want to design a space for children that responds to a pandemic?

Believe it or not, well planned spaces already do this.

There are a few key things to consider when developing a healthy environment.





Questions?
Comments?



LSC

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Public Comment